

CHAIR'S REPORT
OF THE
SPRING WORKSHOP OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SPECIES WORKING GROUPS

Hilton Hotel
Silver Spring, MD

March 7-8, 2005

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Advisory Committee Chairman

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Summary: The Advisory Committee (AC) to the U.S. Section to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) convened its spring Species Working Group (SWG) meeting on March 7-8, 2005, at the Hilton Hotel in Silver Spring, Maryland. The four Species Working Groups (Swordfish, Bluefin Tuna, Billfish, and BAYS or Bigeye, Albacore, Yellowfin, and Skipjack Tunas) are composed of AC members and Technical Advisors, as appointed by the U.S. Commissioners to ICCAT.

On March 7, the Committee discussed the 2004 ICCAT meeting results, U.S. implementation of ICCAT recommendations, 2005 SCRS research activities, and NMFS research and monitoring activities. The Committee also received an update on Commission activities and discussed administrative business. An update on the consultation regarding identification of countries that diminish the effectiveness of ICCAT was also provided.

In the afternoon, the Committee and its Technical Advisors broke into SWGs for detailed discussions. The purpose of the working group meetings was to identify management and research priorities that the Advisory Committee might wish to recommend to the U.S. Commissioners. Each SWG was asked to consider previous SWG recommendations, the status of the stocks, the effectiveness of current international conservation and management measures, research and data needs, compliance issues, and any other matters relating to U.S. goals for and responsibilities under ICCAT. The SWGs met again in the morning of March 8 to finalize their recommendations. The convener of each SWG presented the results of the working group discussions to the Committee in open session for consideration. The Committee adopted the four SWG reports.

The agenda for the meeting is attached as Appendix 1. The list of participants is included as Appendix 2. The final reports of the SWGs are included as Appendix 3, as Attachments 1 through 4 (Billfish, BAYS tunas, Swordfish, and Bluefin tuna, respectively).

ICCAT 101. Prior to the opening of the meeting, Dr. John Graves conducted a seminar on ICCAT for new members and any other interested parties. The presentation outlined the basic structure of ICCAT and its processes for making recommendations. In addition, an overview of the biology of each major ICCAT species and the current management regime was presented. Dr. Graves' presentation is available from the Committee's Executive Secretary upon request.

I. Opening of Meeting

Welcome and Introductions. Advisory Committee Chairman Dr. John Graves opened the meeting on March 7, 2004. He welcomed all committee members, especially new members and technical advisors. Dr. Graves briefly went over the purpose of the meeting. Dr. Hogarth introduced the new members of the Advisory Committee and the new Technical Advisors, which was followed by introductions from all attendees.

Adoption of Agenda. The agenda was adopted without changes.

Security Briefing. The Committee was briefed by Deirdre Warner-Karmer from the Department of State

on various issues related to ICCAT. Specifically, members were reminded that all discussions of the Committee are confidential, except for those held during public sessions. Ms. Warner-Kramer expressed the importance of confidentiality of U.S. delegation discussions prior to and at ICCAT meetings and the responsibility of all U.S. delegation members to present a united position, particularly at annual and intersessional ICCAT meetings. Private sector representatives that serve on U.S. delegations are responsible for representing the United States and not their constituency at these meetings. The accreditation of delegations through the DOS was also reviewed.

Appointment of the Planning and Review Sub-Committee. The chair appointed Dr. John Mark Dean (vice-chair of the Advisory Committee), Rich Ruais, Ray Bogan and Liz Lauck to the Planning and Review Sub-Committee.

Appointment of Conveners and Rapporteurs. The Chair appointed a rapporteur for each SWG and allowed each SWG to choose its own convener. Kelly Denit was appointed rapporteur for BAYS Working Group, Melissa Paine for the Swordfish Working Group, Erika Carlsen for the Bluefin Tuna Working Group, and Dave Kerstetter for the Billfish Working Group. The following individuals were selected by the working groups as conveners: Ray Bogan for BAYS, Gail Johnson for Swordfish, Dave Secor for Bluefin, and Ellen Peel for Billfish.

II. 2004 ICCAT Meeting Results

The Chair presented the accomplishments of the 2004 ICCAT meeting. The PowerPoint presentation is available from the Committee's Executive Secretary upon request.

One member asked Dr. Graves about the issue of China's production of longline vessels. It was pointed out that the capacity-reduction plan with Japan looks good on the surface, in fact, behind the scenes, China is producing a massive number of longline vessels. Dr. Graves noted the importance of the issue of capacity and the fact that it will be revisited at the 2005 annual meeting.

Another member asked whether the removal of FADs during the time/area closure in the Gulf of Guinea was required and if the FADs used in the area were removeable. Deirdre Warner-Karmer responded, stating that the required removal of FADs was not stipulated in the recommendation, but was noted on the record as part of the discussions. The enforcement of the removal of FADs was unclear and it was pointed out that FADs could float or be dragged from the closed area and, once outside the closed area, could be fished on.

Another question was put forth regarding the proposal to change the definition of large scale vessels from those greater than 24 meters, to those greater than 15 meters LOA. It was pointed out that this change could potentially be an issue for U.S. domestic management and should be considered thoroughly by the United States.

A member noted that the increase to a 10 kg minimum size for bluefin tuna was adopted for the Mediterranean, but not the rest of the eastern Atlantic and that this creates a loophole for the illegal catch of undersized fish.

One member requested additional information on the ICCAT Chairman's request that nations submit proposals prior to the start of the Commission meeting, since the EC continues to use delay tactics to push their recommendations through. The Chair responded by acknowledging that the EC has complied with the letter, but not the spirit, of the Chairman's request. He added that the ICCAT Chairman had asked that all recommendations be submitted before the meeting, but later extended the deadline to the middle of the week. The EC submitted their recommendations in time of the mid-week deadline, but held several

proposals and did not allow them to be circulated until very late in the meeting. The United States will continue to work on this issue.

III. U.S. Implementation of ICCAT Decisions

Dr. Christopher Rogers, Chief of the NMFS Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division, reported on the rulemakings underway to implement past ICCAT decisions. The annual BFT quota and General Category effort controls will be published before the start of the 2005 fishing year. The SWO and BET Statistical Documents rule is effective as of July 1, 2005. The ICCAT recommendation on shark finning requires full utilization of the carcass and that fins are less than or equal to 5% (by weight) of carcass weights. The U.S. Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2002 is consistent with these requirements. He also summarized the status of trade restrictions and other trade measures. NMFS has also begun its review of the potential change in the definition of large scale vessels from 24m to 15m LOA, including estimating the number of U.S. vessels that would be identified under this new definition. A copy of the presentation summarizing the status on implementation of ICCAT recommendations is available from the AC's Executive Secretary upon request.

One member expressed concern over the number of vessels that would be added to the U.S. vessel list if the change from 24m to 15m LOA is adopted. The estimated increase in vessels identified as large scale would be approximately 1000 vessels or more across all categories. Dr. Rogers responded by stating that NMFS was in the process of reviewing the list and will report the results, along with all the other members, to ICCAT. The Commission will then decide what is the appropriate action.

Another member asked about the size of Asian catcher boats in the Caribbean and whether these vessels were between 15 and 24 meters in length. No one was sure of the size of the vessels in question, but most appear to be 23.9m or less.

A member pointed out, in reference to the TAC in the central North Atlantic, that the United States does not have vessels less than 24m LOA that fish in that area. However, the United States does have a historical fishery in the area and the U.S. Commissioners need to make sure the United States does not lose quota should sharing arrangements be developed for this area.

One member noted that the impetus for this adjustment in the definition of large scale seems to have changed. He added that although the change from 24m to 15m LOA for large scale vessels would greatly increase the number of vessels covered, it is also important to acknowledge that majority of the fishery is being conducted by these smaller vessels. It was emphasized that this could create a sticky situation for the United States and therefore a sound rationale for opposing this rule would be necessary. The issues of VMS and reporting on these vessels was also mentioned.

Another question was raised regarding the U.S. implementation of the ICCAT's negative list and how the United States prevents the import of products obtained through IUU fishing. Dr. Rogers responded that a rule is in place that allows U.S. Customs to deny product if the Statistical Document (SD) for the shipment is from a vessel on the negative list. He added that the negative list has a small number of vessels on it, which makes it easier for Customs to monitor. However, he did caution about the potential use of falsified SDs.

A member asked about the U.S.' ability to act unilaterally on trade restrictions. In response, it was noted that the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA) does allow for unilateral action, however, the United States has preferred the multi-lateral approach at ICCAT instead of unilateral action. In fact, the United States has not supported proposals at ICCAT that basically provide ICCAT-supported unilateral actions, because such actions lack due process and undermine ICCAT's current trade regime. The major problem

with these proposals for the United States is enforcement, as the number of ports and products entering through those ports is quite large. These two factors together make it very hard for the United States to track imports of products not covered by a SDP to effectively implement the type of unilateral action being proposed at ICCAT. The National Plan of Action (NPOA) for IUU fishing contains recommendations to try and improve this situation and those are being worked on now.

IV. Commission Related Issues

Commission Update. Ms. Erika Carlsen provided an update to the AC on Commission membership stating that Senegal had become a member of ICCAT. She also noted that the positions of Publications Coordinator and Compliance Officer are currently being advertised.

2005 Schedule and other issues. Dr. Bill Hogarth reviewed the 2005 schedule of meetings, including the ICCAT Intersessional meetings in Japan in April and the SCRS Billfish Data Preparatory and Juvenile Tropical Tuna meetings in May and June. There will be two Fall meetings of the AC in order to ensure U.S. preparedness for the Annual meeting in November.

Dr. Hogarth pointed out the tremendous workload that the SCRS is facing in 2006 and suggested the AC think about this when making its recommendations. Bluefin tuna minimum size requirements, farming and allocation issues (especially with regard to Mexico) will all be important in the coming year. He emphasized the importance of bigeye tuna due to the changes in the Gulf of Guinea closure. The use of data report cards to ensure the accurate and timely reporting of catches needs to be revisited this year also. Several other topics were mentioned including transshipment, observer coverage, gill netting by Morocco and support given to Ghana to help improve their data collection. Dr. Hogarth also announced the reformation of the NMFS Office of International Affairs, under the direction of Jean-Pierre Plé, and the need for coordination between this office, the Department of State and the NOAA Office of International Affairs.

Dr. Hogarth also announced his interest in running for the Chair of ICCAT. He discussed his desire to make ICCAT more transparent and accessible, especially to developing nations. Working with the current Commission chairman, he wants to ensure that more parties are involved in the negotiation process.

V. 2005 SCRS Research Activities and U.S. Participation

Dr. Gerald Scott of the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) presented the schedule of ICCAT scientific meetings to be held in 2005. He began his presentation with a brief overview of the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), including the working groups and special research programs, and its role within ICCAT. A summary of the last stock assessments combined with a schedule for future assessments for all species was shown, emphasizing the huge effort that will be required by the SCRS in 2006. Two important upcoming meetings are the 3rd Meeting of the Working Group to Develop Integrated and Coordinated Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Management Strategies (April 20th-23rd) and a review of the Statistical Monitoring Programs (April 25th-27th). A data preparation meeting for billfish is scheduled for the 9th-13th of May. He also mentioned the workshop on methods to reduce mortality of juvenile tropical tuna, which will be held May 30th thru June 3rd. Copies of this presentation are available from the AC's Executive Secretary upon request.

A member asked whether the upcoming bluefin tuna research planning meeting (June 20th-23rd) is for the purpose of developing research priorities for future research or reviewing previous research. Dr. Scott stated that the meeting evolved from a SCRS recommendation regarding the bluefin tuna research proposal, which required a significant amount of funding. The Commission requested the SCRS to scale

back the proposal, and the SCRS agreed to meet to prioritize the research proposal.

Another member asked who would be attending the Billfish Workshop. David Die, Eric Prince, Beth Babcock, Muricio Ortiz and Jerry Scott are tentatively scheduled to attend.

One member expressed concern about how the use of circle hooks will be accounted for, in terms of selectivity in the pelagic longline fishery, in the stock assessments given that j-hooks were used in the past. The United States has paired experiments from NED that will allow scientists to adjust the catch rates, however, this may not work for all species, particularly billfish. Other changes in gear such as the use of monofilament will also have effects. The issue of post-release survival is also important. Right now, post-release mortality of fish released alive is not counted, which is a bigger issue for protected species and species like marlin. . It is important to start tagging all fish that are caught in order to monitor post-release survival.

A member asked for clarification on the bluefin tuna research proposal and the general agreement internationally for increased research. He noted that discussions on alternative management options at the last meeting of the bluefin tuna working group in Marseille were quickly ended because of the lack of information on mixing rates. Meanwhile, the catch data in the eastern Atlantic are so poor and require a large amount of money to address, there is concern that those data needs will draw a significant amount of money away from the real research needs for bluefin tuna. Dr. Scott stated that the recommendations that come out of the intersessional meeting on bluefin tuna in Japan will have some affect on the research priorities. However, taking all the elements together would be very expensive. He also agreed that catch statistics in the eastern Atlantic are a priority, but the question is whether this should be dealt with by the Commission or by the countries fishing in the area. The research plan is very expensive and lacks detail which is why it was suggested that a bluefin tuna coordinator position be created.

Another member asked how U.S. research compares with the studies conducted in the eastern Atlantic. All groups try to follow the SCRS recommendations, but, Dr. Scott stipulated, everyone is under pressure from the domestic side. Genetics and otoliths are less expensive methods, compared to electronic tagging, to analyze connection between the two sides of the Atlantic and therefore are used often. Most U.S. scientists have good contacts and relations with their European colleagues so there is some interaction between the two groups.

IV. NMFS Research and Monitoring Activities

Dr. Rogers briefly reviewed past and current research activities with respect to ICCAT-managed species. Dr. Rogers' presentation is available from the AC's Executive Secretary, upon request.

In response to the AC request for information about completed and ongoing research, Jackie Wilson, Sea Grant fellow in the Highly Migratory Species Division, proposed putting together a database that would be web accessible and keyword searchable. One member applauded the effort and suggested including the SCRS reports and research being conducted in the Pacific. Dr. Scott pointed out that SCRS reports are available on the ICCAT website so it may not be necessary to include them in this database. Another member provided specific items he would like to see in the database, including: how much money the grant is for, what percentage of the investigators time is devoted to the project, expected outcome, and whether there is internal or external funding.

VI. Consultation Regarding ATCA Identification of Countries

Kim Blankenbeker, NMFS Office of International Affairs, reported that the 2005 review under ATCA Section 971 d(c)(6) is ongoing. ATCA limits the scope of the review to the current and previous year.

The United States has never unilaterally identified a country, preferring to work multilaterally instead. However, a lot has been accomplished thru ICCAT, including the imposition and lifting of sanctions consistent with the intent of ATCA. The new ICCAT trade measure resolution provides a lot of latitude for use because of its broad scope and lack of limit on the years that can be reviewed. In 2004, ICCAT identified Taiwan, Singapore, Costa Rica, and Cuba. Sanctions on Cambodia and Sierra Leone were lifted and maintained for Bolivia and Georgia. Identifications on Togo and Seychelles were revoked.

VII. Comments on NMFS Recreational Fishery Landings Estimates Review

Dr. Graves began by giving background on the issue. The recreational catches were estimated by a contractor using point intercept methods. In measuring the fish, there is concern the contractor took the curved lengths of at least some fish as opposed to the straight lengths. Since a correction was applied to adjust (increase) estimated weights from straight line to curved length measurements, the use of curved lengths, and then applying a correction to adjust estimated weights from straight to curved lengths, would result in an overestimate of the amount of catch. These overestimations may have contributed to putting the U.S. over its quota for the past two years. There is a need for an independent review of this issue. The ad hoc committee that was formed to review it previously was not considered to be independent by the AC. In addition, the agency should not be relying on the contractor to provide quality assurance of its data collection methods.

One member expressed dissatisfaction with the management of BFT, especially in the south. Concern was expressed regarding the March 31, 2005 deadline for comments on the management plan, especially considering the extensive discussion necessary for dealing with MRFSS and the length measure conversions.

Another member stated that the sources of error are real and need to be fixed as soon as possible because the U.S. creditability at ICCAT is at stake.

A member asked what can be done at the recreational level to deal with this situation and how will the U.S. protect itself at ICCAT if that becomes necessary.

Dr. Rogers responded to the comments stating that the review in 1996 was independent, but that he will report back in 2 weeks (when some AC members will be back in Silver Spring for a panel meeting) about funding for an independent review panel. He will discuss this further with Dr. Van Voorhess. He also stated that if the numbers do not change the United States will need to be ready to deal with that, but if they do change, then the reportings can be adjusted accordingly. Despite being in a negative balance, the 25% penalty was not applied at ICCAT. The United States needs to better manage the Angler category, especially concerning the size class of fish that are caught and school BFT catches.

Dr. Graves concluded the session by asking the BFT species working group to address the issue in its discussions. He also encouraged NMFS to take the AC's concerns more seriously and report back to him in 2 weeks.

IX. Other Open Session Business

FAO Committee on Fisheries. Deirdre Warner-Kramer summarized the main issues that would be discussed at this important meeting. The theme of implementation will be a main focus. There are many instruments negotiated (Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, UN Fish Stock Agreement, etc.) that now need to be put into practice. Other issues to be debated will be ecolabeling, reduction in mortality of sea turtles, deep-sea fishing and methods to review the effectiveness of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). A memorandum of understanding between CITES and FAO will also continue

to be negotiated.

U.S. Oceans Report. Mrs. Warner-Kramer also reviewed the international aspects of the U.S. Oceans Report and provided a handout for the AC. A copy of the handout is available from the Executive Secretary upon request.

IX. Species Working Group Meetings

The conveners of each Species Working Group presented to the full Advisory Committee the preliminary research and management recommendations of their groups. The final versions of these reports, the recommendations of which were adopted by the full Committee, are attached to this report.

XI. Advisory Committee Business

Funding/Budget. Dr. Graves explained to the AC that there is a three-year funding cycle for the AC, at the end of which any carryover from the AC grant is returned to the General Fund. Currently, the AC is in the final year of a three-year cycle. The budget is at 90% of what it would normally be due to costs associated with the 2004 ICCAT meeting in New Orleans. There is money available for two fall meetings this year in addition to the current meeting. Dr. Graves has set aside funds for AC travel to Seville, Spain for the annual ICCAT meeting. The funding will support Dr. Graves, Dave Kerstetter and 6 other members. Funding for AC members to travel to Japan for the intersessional meetings is available (for up to three members). Members can request to be on the U.S. delegation to Japan, but the final decision will be left to the Commissioners.

2005 AC Schedule. Dr. Graves briefly reviewed the fall schedule, noting that there would be two fall meetings. At the first meeting, the AC will review draft proposals and discuss positions on non-species issues. At the second meeting, the AC will review the outcomes from the SCRS meeting and the trilateral and quadrilateral meetings, finalize discussions on positions, and set priorities for the annual meeting.

XIII. Report of SWG Discussions

On the afternoon of March 7, each of the SWGs met separately in closed session to develop research and management recommendations for consideration by the Advisory Committee as a whole. Once agreed, these recommendations will be transmitted to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries and the U.S. Commissioners to ICCAT. The final reports of these Working Groups are attached. Attachment 1 is the Billfish Working Group Report. Attachment 2 is the BAYS Tunas Working Group Report. Attachment 3 is the Swordfish Working Group Report. Attachment 4 is the Bluefin Tuna Working Group Report.

BAYS Tunas. Ray Bogan presented the recommendations from the BAYS working group. The primary focus of the group was the change in the Gulf of Guinea time/area closure. The EC-proposed recommendation reduced the closure both spatially and temporally, but no scientific evidence supporting the changes was presented. The WG strongly encouraged the United States to have a presence at the SCRS workshop that will review this measure. The WG also voiced concern over the fishing practices of Chinese Taipei, particularly the misreporting of BET catches. A larger issue with Chinese Taipei is capacity. The WG hoped the United States will push for the formation of a working group on capacity within ICCAT. Observer coverage, vessel length and the removal of FADs from the Gulf of Guinea were also discussed.

A member clarified that there is no requirement for minimum observer coverage by ICCAT. One member added that they were unaware that the 5% observer requirement had gone away. It was agreed that the proposed recommendation for 5% coverage by boat was inadequate and not approved.

One member pointed out that the reason the EC may have put forward the current, seemingly inadequate, measure for the Gulf of Guinea closure is enforcement. It is a lot easier to enforce a total ban than to try and enforce different fishing rules at different times of year. The next step would be to expand the moratorium both spatially and temporally if that is what is scientifically prudent. A member of the working group responded that one of the recommendations from the WG is for SCRS to review the implications of the time/area closure and make a recommendation as to what is the best way to move forward.

Another member expressed concern over the vessel length issue. It was stated that the EC is already moving or has moved to a definition of 15m LOA for large scale vessels, so this issue will be revisited at ICCAT. The United States needs to have a careful review of this potential change and also think about other measures that could be considered. A member of the working group echoed the need for a better analysis of the vessel length issue.

A Commissioner noted that perhaps a recommendation regarding IUU could be used in lieu of a recommendation to change the LOA since it seems the main target of the change in vessel length is IUU vessels.

The WG convener also acknowledged that the working group reviewed the letter from the Ocean Conservancy regarding sargassum, but the WG wanted to emphasize tuna and the situation in the Gulf of Guinea.

One member made a few remarks regarding sharks. First, that the U.S. led effort to get a shark finning ban in place was very successful at ICCAT in 2004. However, it is important to be vigilant in the implementation of this measure, especially by other ICCAT members. Second, a review of the fin-to-carcass ratio is scheduled to occur and the United States needs to be prepared to address that issue. Finally, there will be a review of the shortfin mako assessment and management measures may be necessary.

At the conclusion of the comments it was suggested that sharks be moved from the BAYS working group to the Swordfish working group. This was agreed to due to the interaction of sharks and swordfish longline gear.

Billfish. Ellen Peel presented the recommendations from the Billfish Working Group. The WG noted that the use of circle hook technology to help reduce bycatch of billfish in the commercial longlining industry has become widespread. However, in the recreational sector there is still a lack of belief in the effectiveness of the technology and continued outreach needs to be done to improve the situation. Overall, the group was pleased with the direction of billfish research, but did add several priorities given the upcoming assessments of blue and white marlin. Specifically, the WG urged support for continued evaluation and testing of the habitat-based standardization model, including the identification of habitat preferences. Other areas for continued research included research on basic biological parameters for these species and methods to reduce interaction and mortality associated with various fisheries. The WG also encouraged the continued support of science and management capacity-building efforts to promote improved landings statistics throughout the ICCAT fisheries (e.g. Ghana and blue marlin). The management recommendations regarding billfish included: the postponment of the blue and white marlin stock assessments until 2007, reduction of the vessel list minimum length to greater than 15 m, and support of the Brazilian proposal to ban all trade of Atlantic marlin. Other issues that need to be addressed are the reporting of marlin landings consistent with year 2000 recommendations, while still looking for ways to improve the recreational reporting, and encouraging the use of circle hooks in all ICCAT natural bait fisheries.

One member asked about circle hooks and the use of natural baits and artificial lures. It was stated that many captains are having technical difficulties rigging artificial lures with circle hooks. The need for circle hooks on lures was questioned because they are rarely swallowed.

Another member requested information on the trade of marlin by Brazil. One of the Commissioners responded that only two or three countries import marlin. Another member questioned whether cash tournaments would be considered as trade of marlin.

Bluefin Tuna. Dr. David Secor presented the recommendations from the bluefin tuna working group. The major focus of the group was recommendations for the Commissioners regarding the upcoming intersessional meeting on integrated bluefin tuna management. Three main suggestions emerged from the group including: a desire to focus management on the central North Atlantic, a need for SCRS review of western stock rebuilding given realistic scenarios of mixing and exploitation in the central Atlantic, and increased protection for spawning stocks. Other management recommendations included improvements in the recreational catch statistics, achieving sustainable catch limits in the Eastern Atlantic, monitoring of tuna farming and NEI catch, creation of operational models for management, reevaluation of the effects of circle hook use in Atlantic longline fisheries and expansion of the use of circle hooks in longline fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. The working group also put forth several research recommendations in support of its management proposals. The group encouraged research on stock structure throughout the Atlantic, but with particular focus on the Gulf of Mexico spawning population and possible congregations of adults in the Central Atlantic. Continued tagging efforts, a review of technical interactions with longline gear and improvements in juvenile bluefin assessments were also suggested.

One member expressed concern over adding additional layers of reporting to the recreational fishery. Instead the member requested that NMFS improve enforcement of the current requirements.

Another member questioned whether the allocation of small BFT was related to the 8% rule. It was discussed that it is related to the 8% rule and that there are attempts to look for ways to shift the 8% cap in ways that are resource neutral. Meaning that if more fish less than 66 lbs are caught, then less fish greater than 66 lbs can be caught. A member stated that the recreational community should be treated the same as other user groups.

A member requested information regarding discussions with Spain (EC) over the 10 kg size limit. This issue was not reviewed with Spain at the 2004 ICCAT because of time constraints. Another member pointed out that the move from 6.4 to 10 kg is biologically insignificant (although, it was pointed out, it is moving from 1- to 2- year-old fish) and would not be effective unless it is enforced in the Eastern Atlantic. However, this would probably bring objection from Spain due to their large small-fish fishery. It was also noted that strategically this is related to the Gulf of Guinea closure and the need for related closures in other areas in the Eastern Atlantic.

One member questioned the use of time/area closures in the Mediterranean compared to the Gulf of Mexico. The response was that the main focus has been on the western stock due to the uncertainty surrounding migration of Eastern Atlantic spawners to the Western Atlantic. However, the argument can be made that migration does occur and Japan is expected to offer a Mediterranean closure again this year.

Swordfish. Gail Johnson presented the recommendations from the swordfish working group. The primary recommendations were the deferral of swordfish stock assessment to 2007 and the vigorous defense of the current U.S. allocation. Improvements in the reporting of recreationally caught swordfish was strongly supported. The current 8% observer coverage by NMFS of the longline industry was applauded and urged to continue, with the caveats to expand coverage to the recreational sector and to

encourage more coverage internationally. The working group recommended research on stock structure, bycatch mortality and gear modifications continue. Better international compliance with the VMS system, implementation of time/area closures for the protection of small swordfish and juvenile swordfish surveys in support of the young of the year index should all be encouraged. The conservation and management proposals from the working group included: an improved monitoring plan for swordfish, defense of the U.S. allocation, reduction of undersized swordfish mortality, continued efforts to combat IUU fishing and import standards for swordfish products. The need for improved enforcement, sending updated information regarding ICCAT management to the United Nations, and the efforts of the SEFSC to support the IAC were also noted.

One member asked whether recreational U.S. vessels fishing for ICCAT species in a foreign EEZ were required to have a permit. An enforcement officer present responded that the vessel has to comply with the fishing regulations of the foreign country. If that country requires a permit then the vessel must have one from that country. Another member pointed out that in the absence of a required permit by the foreign country, U.S. vessels are still required to have a U.S. issued permit in order to fish. However, the issue of enforcement becomes difficult without the use of VMS. The enforcement officer was uncertain about the necessary permits if the foreign country did not require a permit. The Chair requested that this point be clarified and the results reported back to the Committee in the fall.

Agenda

2005 Spring Species Working Groups Meeting of the Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT

March 7-8, 2005 - Hilton Hotel - Silver Spring, MD

Monday, March 7 (*Open to the Public Unless Otherwise Noted*)

John Graves, Advisory Committee Chairman, presiding

8:15 a.m. i. Opening of Special Session

8:30 ii. ICCAT 101 (*Graves*)

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9:45 I. Registration

10:00 II. Opening of Meeting (*Graves*)

 A. Welcome and Introductions (*Hogarth*)

 B. Adoption of Agenda

 C. Security Briefing (*Warner-Kramer*)

 D. Appointment of Planning and Review Subcommittee

 E. Appointment of Conveners and Rapporteurs

10:30 III. 2004 ICCAT Meeting Results (*Graves*)

11:00 IV. U.S. Implementation of ICCAT Decisions (*Rogers*)

11:30 V. Commission Related Issues

 A. Commission Update (*Carlsen*)

 B. Schedule of Meetings (*Hogarth*)

 C. Other issues (*Hogarth*)

12:15 LUNCH

1:30 VI. 2005 SCRS Research Activities and U.S. Participation (*Scott*)

2:00 VII. NMFS Research and Monitoring Activities (*Rogers*)

2:30 VIII. Consultation Regarding ATCA Identification of Countries (*NMFS*)

2:45 IX. Comments on NMFS Recreational Fishery Landings Estimates Review (*Graves*)

3:15 X. Other Open Session Business

3:30 XI. Species Working Group Meetings (*Closed to the Public*)

?? Session Adjournment

Tuesday, March 8 (*Open to the public unless otherwise noted*)

- 8:30 a.m. Registration
- 9:00 XII. Advisory Committee Business (*Graves*)
 - A. Funding/Budget
 - B. 2005 AC Schedule
 - C. Other Issues
- 9:15 XIII. SWG meetings (Finalization of reports) (*Closed to the Public*)
- 10:30 Break
- 11:00 XIV. Report of SWG Discussions (*Conveners*)
 - Swordfish
- 12:00 LUNCH
- 1:15 XV. Report of SWG Discussions, Continued (*Conveners*)
 - BAYS Tunas
 - Billfish
 - Bluefin Tuna
- 3:00 XVI. Other Business (*Graves*)
 - A. Production of Final Reports and Presentation to NMFS
 - B. Other Business
- 3:15 XVII. Discussion of April Intersessionals (*Hogarth*) (*Closed to the Public*)
- 4:15 Meeting Adjournment

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

U.S. Commissioners to ICCAT

Michael Genovese	Interim Commercial Commissioner
Bill Hogarth	Government Commissioner
Bob Hayes	Recreational Commissioner

Advisory Committee Members

Andrew Baler	Nantucket Fish Company
Nelson Beideman	Blue Water Fishermen's Association
Frank Blount	New England FMC
Chester Brewer	W. Chester Brewer P.A.
Ray Bogan	Bogan and Bogan
John Mark Dean	South Atlantic FMC
Glenn Delaney	Commercial Interests
Jim Donofrio	Recreational Fishing Alliance
John Graves	VA Institute of Marine Science
Gail Johnson	F/V Seneca
Liz Lauck	Wildlife Conservation Society
Ben Moore	Outer Banks Outfitters
Ellen Peel	The Billfish Foundation
Bob Pride	Mid-Atlantic FMC
Eugenio Pineiro	Caribbean FMC
Rich Ruais	East Coast Tuna Association
David Secor	University of Maryland
Randi Parks Thomas	U.S. Tuna Foundation

Committee Members not in Attendance:

<i>Jack Devnew</i>	<i>The Flagship Group</i>
<i>Willie Etheridge</i>	<i>Etheridge Seafood</i>
<i>Sonja Fordham</i>	<i>The Ocean Conservancy</i>
<i>Ken Hinman</i>	<i>National Coalition for Marine Conservation</i>
<i>Russell Nelson</i>	<i>Nelson Consulting</i>
<i>Bobbie Walker</i>	<i>Gulf of Mexico FMC</i>

Technical Advisors

Jim Budi	Predator Packouts
Fernando Garcia	
Meghan Jeans	Marine Fish Conservation Network
Molly Lutcavage	New England Aquarium
Putnam MacLean	Bright Eye Fishing Corp.
Peter Manual	Winter Bluefin Association
Bob McAuliffe	McAuliffe Fishing, Inc.
Don Nehls	Lindgren-Pittman, Inc.
Greg Skomal	Mass. Division of Marine Fisheries
Bob Zales II	Panama City Boatmen Association

Technical Advisors not in Attendance

Pamela Basco
Curt Blisinger
Bob Cowen
Barry Dreyfus
Phil Goodyear
Ron Hamlin

Consultant

Government Personnel

Chris Barrows	U.S. Coast Guard
Kim Blankenbeker	NMFS International Fisheries
Erika Carlsen	NMFS International Fisheries
Michael Clark	NMFS HMS Division
Kelly Denit	NMFS International Fisheries
Stewart Harris	Congressional Affairs
Rebecca Lent	NMFS, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs
Caroline Park	NOAA GCF
Ron Rinaldo	NMFS HMS Division
Christopher Rogers	NMFS HMS Division, Chief
Jerry Scott	NMFS/SEFSC
Deirdre Warner-Kramer	Department of State
Jackie Wilson	NMFS HMS Division

Other Attendees

Sally Campen	Japan Fisheries Association
Jennifer Smith	Office of Advocacy, SBA
Melissa Paine	Virginia Institute of Marine Science
David Kerstetter	Virginia Institute of Marine Science

ATTACHMENT 1

**Report of the Billfish Working Group
Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2005 Species Working Group Workshop**

Hotel Hilton, Silver Spring, MD
March 7-8, 2005

*Ellen Peel, Convener
David Kerstetter, Rapporteur*

The Billfish Working Group discussed on-going billfish research and recommended future actions for ICCAT regarding Atlantic-wide billfish management.

The Working Group received an overview of current domestic billfish research from several scientists and group members. It noted with appreciation the \$1.8 million in billfish research funds that had been disbursed by NOAA Fisheries in late 2004 for the Atlantic Billfish Research Program, but also observed that this amount would not address many of the remaining research needs for this species group. Kelly Denit, a Knauss Sea Grant Fellow with the NMFS International Fisheries Division, briefed the Working Group regarding some current billfish research at the University of Miami, such as the completion of two years of monthly larval sampling off south Florida. Ellen Peel described some of the current billfish assessment-related projects undertaken by Phil Goodyear for The Billfish Foundation. John Graves discussed the work on billfish and post-release mortality done by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and placed these projects within the context of research needs identified by the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS).

The group also broadly discussed the international management needs for this species group. John Graves described the relevant actions affecting billfish at the 2004 ICCAT meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. The issue of moving the scheduled blue marlin and white marlin assessments from 2005 to 2006 was discussed in the context of other SCRS stock assessments scheduled for that year, including eastern and western Atlantic bluefin tuna and north and south Atlantic swordfish. The Working Group also discussed the effects of the scheduled blue marlin and white marlin assessments on domestic management, including the petition to list white marlin under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

A. Research Recommendations

The Working Group noted that NOAA Fisheries has been assessing for years the role of circle hook technology in reducing billfish (and other bycatch) mortality in the commercial pelagic longline fishery, and more recently with the recreational directed billfish fishery. However, it was noted among several group members that there remain user group doubts about the effectiveness of the circle hook in the directed recreational fishery. The technology has not been widely accepted, even with the incentive of increased monetary awards at several major tournaments for release categories. The Working Group suggested continuing outreach programs describing the benefits of circle hooks to recreational billfish anglers.

Overall, the Working Group was satisfied with the overall direction of billfish research and agreed that the United States should support additional work where possible. This includes capacity development internationally through joint billfish research programs, such as the one recently begun

between the Brazilian Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa, the NOAA Fisheries Miami Laboratory, the University of Miami, and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. The billfish research priorities identified by the Working Group are:

- *Continue evaluation and testing of the assumptions inherent in the habitat-based standardization model (“HBS model”), including the identification of habitat preferences of white marlin and blue marlin.* The Working Group believes that addressing the assumptions of the HBS model is essential in the upcoming blue marlin and white marlin data preparatory meeting and later stock assessments.
- *Continue to define basic biological parameters (i.e., age-and-growth, reproduction) for billfishes, particularly in other areas of the Atlantic.* The need for basic biological information was emphasized by a number of work group members, and several members of the Working Group commented favorably on the number of on-going research projects addressing this need.
- *Continue research into methodologies that minimize billfish encounters and mortality in each fishery that catches billfish, including circle hooks.* The Working Group was encouraged by recent findings regarding increased post-release survival of white marlin caught with circle hooks in both the commercial pelagic longline and recreational directed fisheries.
- *Support fisheries science and management capacity-building efforts to improve monitoring and landings statistics in ICCAT fisheries (e.g., Ghana and blue marlin).* The large and sudden increase in reported landings of blue marlin by Ghana indicated the need for domestic institutional fisheries management capacity in that country. Several members noted that there were many other countries in the ICCAT Convention Area with similar reporting problems. To improve stock assessments, and to assist potential ICCAT allies, the Working Group encouraged NOAA Fisheries to support such fisheries science and management capacity-building internationally whenever possible.

B. Management Recommendations

The Working Group discussed the management recommendations from the 2004 ICCAT Advisory Committee meeting in the context of the management measures from the 2004 ICCAT Annual Meeting. The two topics of particular concern were the issues of the scheduled 2006 blue marlin and white marlin stock assessments and the procedures now being used to generate U.S. recreational landing reports for ICCAT. The Working Group proposed the following recommendations:

- *Postpone ICCAT blue marlin and white marlin assessments until 2007.* It was noted in the earlier Advisory Committee meeting that several stocks were scheduled to be assessed in 2006. In order to increase the amount of time and effort devoted to the blue marlin and white marlin assessments, the Working Group agreed that the planned stock assessments for blue marlin and white marlin should be postponed until 2007.
- *Reduce 24 m ICCAT vessel list minimum length to >15 m for current ICCAT management measures.* The Working Group noted with concern that several countries are now building commercial fishing vessels of 23.9 m to avoid compliance with ICCAT measures designed for large capacity vessels. The members agreed that the minimum length should be reduced to include such smaller vessels into ICCAT measures.
- *Support Brazilian proposal to ban all Atlantic marlin trade.* The working group strongly agreed with this proposal and urged the United States to support it at upcoming meetings.
- *Report blue marlin and white marlin landings consistent with 2000 methodologies, while continuing to investigate improved recreational landings reporting means.* The methodology used for estimation of recreational billfish catch was discussed, along with U.S. implementation of the 250-fish catch limit for white and blue marlin and the potential implications of this measure for compliance purposes. One Working Group member noted that the 250 combined blue marlin

and white marlin catch limit was based upon the previous method of estimating recreational marlin catch, and that it was simply improved reporting that explained the apparent increase in U.S. domestic marlin landings. While believing that the United States should continue to report data to ICCAT using the prior methods, the members agreed that NOAA Fisheries should continue to investigate means by which to accurately account for recreational billfish effort and landings.

- *Encourage use of circle hooks throughout ICCAT hook-and-line natural bait fisheries that interact with blue and white marlin.* The group agreed that it would be difficult to require circle hooks on recreational lures, but believes that the use of circle hooks should still be encouraged among both the recreational and commercial fisheries that interact with marlin who use natural baits.

Working Group Members:

Ellen Peel, *Convenor*
 John Graves
 Meghan Jeans
 Ben Moore
 Don Nehls

Other Attendees:

Nelson Beideman
 Mike Genovese
 Bob Hayes
 David Kerstetter, *Rapporteur*

ATTACHMENT 2

**Report of the Bigeye, Albacore, Yellowfin, and Skipjack (BAYS)
Tunas Working Group**

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2005 Species Working Group Workshop

Hilton Hotel - Silver Spring
March 7 – March 8, 2005

*Ray Bogan, Convener
Kelly Denit, Rapporteur*

I. Recommendations for BAYS Tunas*A. Gulf of Guinea*

The Gulf of Guinea is the major spawning ground for bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna. It is a critical area for the production of BAYS tuna, and the vast majority of “undersized” bigeye and yellowfin tuna are harvested from this region. The loss of these smaller fish to the fishery is exacerbated by excessive catches of adults in other areas by Chinese Taipei. The combined effects of these significant catches make it probable that the total catch of this species is exceeding the suggested value of MSY; this may be putting the BAYS fisheries in a precarious position.

Therefore, the United States should:

- ❑ Push forward a SCRS review of the effectiveness of the 3 month and 1 month time/area closure relative to historical catch in the area to determine the most scientific and ecologically sound management measures
- ❑ Specifically, seek the scientific rationale behind the EC’s 2004 recommendation
- ❑ Support ICCAT review of whether the FADs typically used in the Gulf should be allowed to remain in the area during closure since their presence could dramatically increase the likelihood that smaller tunas will be harvested at the end of the closure

B. Issues with Chinese Taipei

There is grave concern regarding overfishing by Chinese Taipei. The Working Group feels strongly that ICCAT Commissioners, working with the Department of State, need to take appropriate steps, in cooperation with other ICCAT nations, to improve the fishing practices of Chinese Taipei.

Including the following steps:

- ❑ Ensure that Chinese Taipei follow through on the MOU between our two parties
- ❑ If CT’s plan to remedy issues is inadequate then support strong action to assure compliance
- ❑ Emphasize concerns regarding underreporting, overharvesting, and transshipments

C. Data Reporting

MRFSS and LPS landings data collection programs are fatally flawed and have failed. It is time to acknowledge that they cannot be further modified or adapted for the current needs of fishery management. The BAYS SWG recommends the development of a HMS landings data collection program that meets high standards for accuracy and precision.

Major points:

- ❑ Reworking previous data is an unacceptable method to remedy this issue
- ❑ A number of solutions have been suggested in previous meetings and the WG requests that NMFS review these options
- ❑ These flawed data are reported to ICCAT and therefore have the potential to negatively affect future allocations
- ❑ Presentation of inaccurate data to ICCAT weakens the U.S.'s repeated requests for prompt, accurate fishery data from other nations and reduces our negotiating position

D. Data Reporting in the Caribbean

Collection of data in Puerto Rico has made significant progress. Overall, the level of reporting has improved, mainly because of better landings records coordinated with enhanced enforcement. NMFS should use these improvements in Puerto Rico as a case study that demonstrates the strong connection between enforcement and reporting. The WG applauds the efforts by NMFS to help Puerto Rico through increased funding and training and hopes to see such efforts expand to the USVI and other areas.

Major points:

- ❑ Request that NMFS conduct a retrospective analysis of tuna fishery in PR and USVI; important to show extent of historical fishery so if quotas used, U.S. will get appropriate share
- ❑ Important to link enforcement and reporting- Puerto Rico has improved reporting (trip tickets); mainly linked to improvement in enforcement
- ❑ NMFS needs to review the impacts of the artisanal fishery in the area
- ❑ Reporting major problem in USVI; mainly due to lack of funding and lumping of tunas with other species on trip tickets

E. Capacity

The issue of capacity continues to be a critical concern

The United States should:

- ❑ Encourage ICCAT to revisit the U.S. white paper on capacity presented at the 2004 annual meeting, which called for the establishment of an ICCAT Working Group on Capacity.
- ❑ Help formulate clear rules on transshipment and improved monitoring of such catches

F. Observer Coverage and Vessel length

- ❑ Work towards 5% observer coverage by day or trip (not by boat)
- ❑ 15m vessel length could cause major logistical problem for U.S. domestically- a study of the impact of this change should be a priority for NMFS

G. Research Goals

- ❑ Need to further examine efficacy of the time/area closure in Gulf of Guinea
- ❑ Review the removal of FADs from closed areas

These are the priority issues for the BAYS SWG. They should not be interpreted as our exclusive concerns. Several other issues have been well developed in past reports of the Working Group and should be reviewed.

BAYS Tunas Working Group Members

Ray Bogan (Convener)
 John Dean
 Bob McAuliffe (Technical Advisor)
 Randi Thomas
 Greg Skomal (Technical Advisor)
 Geno Pinero
 Fernando Garcia

Other Attendees

Kelly Denit (NMFS Rapporteur)
 Deirdre Warner-Kramer
 Kim Blankenbeker
 Mike Genovese
 Bob Hayes

ATTACHMENT 3

Report of the Swordfish Working Group

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2005 Species Working Group Workshop

Hilton Hotel, Silver Spring, MD
March 7-8, 2004

Gail Johnson, Convener
Melissa Paine, Rapporteur

Primary Recommendations. We recommend deferral of swordfish stock assessment and allocation discussions to 2007. The U.S. should aggressively defend its swordfish allocation. To demonstrate to ICCAT member nations that the U.S. can fully utilize its swordfish quota, we must take effective actions to revitalize the fishery.

A. Research & Monitoring Recommendations

1. **U.S. Reporting.** With the new permitting and reporting requirements, NMFS should provide an estimate of the universe of all HMS anglers and the landings of recreationally caught swordfish. Currently, recreational anglers participating in HMS fisheries within state waters may not be required to have federal permits. A condition of an HMS permit must be requiring compliance regardless of where the boat fishes. NMFS needs to coordinate with state marine divisions to identify and fully describe all HMS angling activities. When new permitting and reporting requirements are implemented, estimates of recreational HMS harvest will be more complete.
2. **Observer Coverage.** NMFS should continue to achieve up to 8% observer coverage on pelagic long-line vessels. Additionally, NMFS should request comparable voluntary observer coverage on recreational HMS anglers within swordfish nursery closed areas. The ultimate goal of comparable observer coverage on all HMS fisheries should be a priority of NMFS.
3. **International Observer Coverage.** The working group recommends that NMFS investigate ways to develop incentives for observer coverage based on effort, comparable to the US, across a wider range of HMS fisheries. More reliable information is more saleable to the ICCAT community. ICCAT should explore creative funding sources to assist those countries lacking observer coverage to achieve compliance, i.e., non-governmental organizations or foundations.
4. **Stock Structure.** NMFS research on genetic sampling to determine north/south Atlantic stock boundaries is ongoing; a symposium on these issues is likely to take place in 2005, and the United States should participate.
5. **Bycatch Mortality.** The working group appreciates the opportunistic work that the SEFSC and others have completed and continues to support the development of research programs to determine survival rates of released swordfish from all gear types using pop-up tags or other appropriate methodology. We continue to encourage research focused on survival rates of HMS species from all gear types.

6. **Gear Modification Research.** The working group recommends continuing and accelerating research for the development of additional gear modifications to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality, with emphasis on methods that are exportable.
7. **Vessel Tracking.** The United States should encourage countries to comply with the existing ICCAT VMS recommendation.
8. **Time/Area Closures.** The working group believes international time/area closures should be aggressively pursued to protect small swordfish.
9. **Data Needs.** The US should conduct the juvenile swordfish surveys necessary to continue the young of the year index.

B. Conservation and Management Recommendations

1. **Monitoring Plan.** Currently, ICCAT lacks comprehensive data regarding stock and age structure. We strongly recommend efforts to monitor and evaluate the condition of the stock to ensure that the integrity of the swordfish rebuilt stock is maintained. If necessary, NMFS should pursue an ICCAT recommendation that the U.S. conduct a juvenile swordfish abundance survey. The purpose of the survey is to develop a good juvenile swordfish index.
2. **Allocation.** The United States should aggressively defend its allocated shares for swordfish and all species. NMFS should take the necessary steps to assure the ability of the U.S. to utilize its quota, (e.g., and or modify upgrade restrictions on pelagic long-liners). We request that NMFS pursue cooperative research to modify time area closures to better identify areas for juvenile protection while still allowing a viable pelagic long-line fleet that can utilize the United States ICCAT quota.
3. **Reduce Undersized Swordfish Mortality.** The United States should work with other countries to identify areas of high catch of undersized swordfish, marlin and other highly migratory species. The working group also encourages the transfer of positive findings from longline gear modification research to foreign fleets.
4. **Combating IUU.** The US should continue to pursue additional, more effective strategies that support multi-lateral authority to implement relevant unilateral measures including trade restrictive measures against Parties that do not comply with ICCAT management measures.
5. **Import Requirements.** We recommend that HMS imports be subject to the same conservation and mitigation standards as those required of U.S. fishermen.

C. Other Issues

1. Enforcement

NMFS should aggressively pursue enforcement actions to stop illegal sales of swordfish, with particular focus on enforcement in the Southeast region. Enforcement should make examples of non-complying fishermen, fish dealers, and restaurateurs.

2. UNGA Resolution.

The ICCAT Secretariat should prepare a report describing the conservation actions that it has implemented since its inception, updating the United Nations and other relevant entities with regard to its progressive, state of the art management mandates for multilateral natural resource management

3. SEFSC Report.

The working group appreciates the efforts of the SEFSC in preparing reports for the IAC and request they continue to work with NMFS staff on data needs related to:

- Status of time/area closures and impacts on stocks/fishery
- Status and effectiveness of minimum size compliance
- Pertinent research results from NMFS and academic science
- HMS bycatch estimates from all US fisheries

Swordfish Working Group Members

Nelson Beideman

Curt Blisinger (technical advisor – absent)

Frank Blount

Chester Brewer

Barry Dreyfus (technical advisor – absent)

Ken Hinman (absent)

Gail Johnson (convener)

Putnam MacLean (technical advisor)

Bob Pride

Bob Zales (technical advisor - absent)

Other Attendees

Melissa Paine (VIMS - Rapporteur)

Mike Genovese (Commercial Commissioner)

Bob Hayes (Recreational Commissioner)

Caroline Park

John Dean

ATTACHMENT 4

Report of the Bluefin Tuna Working Group

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2005 Species Working Group Workshop

Holiday Inn, Silver Spring, MD
March 7-8, 2005

David Secor, Convener
Erika Carlsen, Rapporteur

A. Recommendations for 2005 ICCAT Bluefin Tuna Intersessional in Fukuoka, Japan

1. Expanded range of western Atlantic stock. The Working Group recommends that US Representatives to the ICCAT Intersessional to Develop Integrated and Coordinated Bluefin Tuna Management Strategies focus on science and management issues in the central North Atlantic. We urge expansion of the current western Atlantic 45 W. longitude division line to include Boxes 3 and 4 in the six-box model. New and compelling scientific evidence has demonstrated substantial rates of migration of western Atlantic bluefin tuna into regions of the central North Atlantic, east of the current stock boundary. Because of this migration, western Atlantic bluefin tuna are exposed to exploitation rates that may exceed those that would be recommended for western population rebuilding. From the 2001 ICCAT Mixing Report, the Working Group notes that, “the catch of western-origin fish in the east Atlantic management area generates a higher proportion of the fishing mortality rate on the western-origin fish than is the case for the converse scenario.” On this basis we believe that ICCAT should take a precautionary approach and adjust the stock boundaries in the north Atlantic to address current understanding.
2. SCRS Guidance. We recommend that the Working Group at the Intersessional request that the SCRS in 2005 investigate scenarios of Western stock rebuilding under realistic scenarios of mixing and exploitation in the Central Atlantic (boxes 3 and 4). Such scenarios should include changes to TAC in the central Atlantic in harvest rates (e.g., reduction of TAC) or distribution (e.g., shifting TAC to regions outside a Central Atlantic Buffer Zone).
3. Protection of spawning areas. Gains to Western stock rebuilding due to scenarios of shifting effort from the Central Atlantic should be compared with the relative costs and benefits of additional measures that can be taken to protect Western stock spawners in the Gulf of Mexico. While the benefits of such measures are expected to be minor (few bluefin tuna are taken as incidental harvest), circle hooks and other measures may be feasible means to further reduce incidental mortality of large bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico (see Research Recommendations).

B. Research Recommendations

1. **Stock Structure Research.** The Working Group recommends continued support by NMFS and ICCAT for ongoing efforts to develop natural tags of population origin using genetics and otolith microconstituents. We also recognize that there occur other potential markers of stock origin including morphometrics, meristics, parasites, contaminants and other biological attributes. These parameters have been infrequently and independently used to discriminate stocks, but may be used to greater advantage if used simultaneously.
2. **Central North Atlantic research.** Questions remain on the biological and demographic determinants of aggregation by adult bluefin tuna in the central North Atlantic. The Working Group requests that NMFS scientists work with other scientists and the U.S. longline fleet to collect, distribute, and analyze biological samples in order to resolve outstanding questions on the reproductive biology, spatial distribution, connectivity between fishing areas, size and age structure, and population origin of adults captured in this region.
3. **Tagging efforts.** The Working Group strongly recommends continued NMFS and international research support for conventional and electronic tagging to identify migration patterns, environmental associations, and exchange rates across the Atlantic Ocean. We ask NMFS to work with ICCAT partners to support international coordination on the development and deployment of electronic tags in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. We also urge continued support of improved tags, resolution of technical problems of data reception, tag retention, and tag recovery.
4. **Gulf of Mexico spawning stock research.** Due to uncertainty in the status of the Gulf of Mexico spawning stock, the Working Group suggests research, monitoring, and further analysis of catch data to evaluate trends in abundance, demographic attributes, reproductive condition, and spawning potential of adult bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico. Further, there is increased concern that the larval index is not reflective of changes in spawning potential occurring in the Western population. NMFS should work with other agencies to support research on oceanographic conditions underlying larval distributions. Beyond encouraging more research on these topics, we also recommend that SCRS develop a comprehensive observer program to monitor bluefin tuna bycatch in U.S. and Mexican pelagic longline fisheries.
5. **Technical interactions.** The Working Group notes the increased use of pelagic longline time area closures as a bycatch management strategy for bluefin tuna and requests that research on gear modifications (now 100% circle hooks) be investigated as an alternative strategy for reducing bycatch and bycatch mortality of bluefin tuna. The Working Group further requests NMFS to expand similar research on the use of circle hooks in all HMS fisheries that interact with bluefin tuna
6. **Improved assessment of juvenile bluefin tuna.** There is a continued gap in our knowledge of juvenile distribution, abundance and ecology in the western Atlantic. The Working Group recommends pursuit of fishery independent surveys (e.g., aerial surveys), mark-recapture studies using conventional tags, electronic tagging studies, environmental analyses, and other approaches.

C. Management Recommendations

1. **Recreational category statistics.** The Working Group continues its strong recommendation that NMFS aggressively move away from survey-based methods towards census-based methods to determine recreational landings. Due to continued uncertainty in this important category, the US

risks substantially misreporting landings to ICCAT. In this pursuit, the Group urges immediate revision of all Angling permits to require anglers to secure, in addition to the fishing permit, fish tail tags and reporting cards to be supplied by NMFS. The permit should require all anglers to apply the tag to the fish prior to the fish being removed from the vessel. It should also require that a self addressed, postage paid landing card be completed with required data including, at least, permit number, vessel name, documentation/registration number, the date the fish was caught, the port at which it was landed, curved lower jaw fork length consistent with ICCAT practice (weight if possible) and mailed to NMFS within 24 hours of landing. Alternatively, an annual reporting “punch” card could be required to be filed prior to renewal of the permit and to determine consistency with the mandatory 24 hour call in program. Angling vessels already participating in a mandatory logbook program would be exempt.

The permit should also clearly indicate that possession of angling category fish not properly tagged is a regulatory violation subject to appropriate fines and permit sanctions for repeat offenses. Upon implementation of this census based tag reporting system, NMFS should conduct targeted enforcement in cooperation with the States until a satisfactory level of compliance is achieved.

The Working Group also strongly recommends NMFS convene an independent peer review (utilizing scientists not connected to the LPS) to investigate recently discovered potential sources of serious overestimation of angling catches in recent years. These sources of overestimation include the assumption that survey intercept employees collect accurate straight line measurements requiring conversion to curved fork length and adding 17% to the estimate of the total weight of angler catch. The investigation should include consideration of a census (or adequate sample) of the 900+ anglers intercepted in 2002-03 to determine the type of measure conducted, whether a measure was conducted at all and to collect any supportive evidence. This information can be used to develop an accurate ratio of straight or curved measures actually conducted in these two years and to allow any appropriate total catch estimation revisions.

The Working Group recommends review of the NMFS length-weight conversion key used to estimate the total weight of angler catches. This review should include alternative length-weight data available from the State of North Carolina, other States and other sources including the historical General category landings database. Appropriate revisions to the NMFS length-weight key can then be applied to the 2002-03-04 surveys and until the survey is replaced by the recommended census based tag reporting system.

Finally, the Working Group recommends that this independent peer review be submitted to SCRS for consideration and adoption prior to any revisions to the U.S. historical catch estimates for angling catches.

2. Achieve sustainable levels of fishing in eastern Atlantic. The Working Group believes that the Commissioners should continue to make it a US priority objective to achieve substantial reductions in the Eastern Atlantic TAC at the 2005 meeting in Seville. There is increasing evidence of mixing across the 45-degree stock boundary, and we note that excessive harvest of western-origin fish in the eastern Atlantic will curtail recovery of the western stock. The recently adopted 10 kg minimum size limit for the Mediterranean should be expanded to cover the Eastern Atlantic management area. . The Working Group notes that an expansion of this minimum size to the Western Atlantic is unwarranted because adequate measures to protect small fish already exist.
3. Monitoring of tuna farming/NEI catch. The Working Group is not confident that the 2004 ICCAT recommendation on tracking bluefin tuna farming activities is adequate to close potential loopholes that enable countries to obscure exceeded quotas of wild fish. The Working Group perceives the need for much more detailed accounting processes, which include video-based monitoring as the fish are transferred from tow cages to holding pens. The U.S. should work with

other ICCAT members to develop; (1) reliable video-based, verifiable methods to track the amount of harvest going into the farms, (2) an accurate, quantitative method of assessing weight gain due to growth in captivity, and (3) a process for reconciling farm production with quota categories.

4. Development of operational models for management. The Working Group endorses a proposal by NMFS scientists to develop an “Operational Assessment Model” that allows managers and interested parties within SCRS to incorporate biological realism into assessments and to make better-informed policy decisions. The Group expects that this effort will build upon, among other considerations, the alternative stock structures examined during the 2001 ICCAT Mixing Workshop and the resultant report. Because of the diverse issues entailed in the development and application of these models, participation in its development should include scientific experts, managers, and user groups. For the upcoming Bluefin Tuna Research Planning Intersessional, the Working Group recommends that a directed research program be pursued that adheres to the goals and research recommendations developed at the Intersessional Fukuoka meeting on mixing and integrated management for bluefin tuna. Further, ICCAT research dollars should not go towards collecting basic catch data in support of better assessments, which has been suggested by some EC scientists.
5. Reevaluations based on circle hook use. The Working Group requests that NMFS reevaluate; (1) bluefin selectivity, catch-per-unit-effort and immediate and post release mortality as they relate to stock assessments, and (2) the comparative effectiveness of other current management measures including current US time-area closures, in the context of the extensive shift to the use of circle hooks in Atlantic pelagic longline fisheries.
6. Using circle hooks in the Gulf of Mexico. The Working Group requests the US to pursue negotiations at the 2006 meeting and thereafter, as necessary, to require the use of circle hooks and achieve adequate observer coverage in all HMS fisheries that interact with bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico with particular emphasis on Mexican pelagic longline vessels.

Bluefin Tuna Working Group Members

Jim Donofrio
 Mike Genovese
 Richard Ruais
 Glenn Delaney
 Andy Baler
 Liz Lauck
 Molly Lutcavage
 Jim Budi
 Peter Manual
 David Secor (Convener)